

Town of New Canaan

Registrars of Voters

77 Main St. / PoBox 14 New Canaan, Ct. 06840

1-203-594-3060 (Fax 1-203-594-3130)

Kathleen.redman@newcanaanct.gov ; George.cody@newcanaanct.gov

TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO: SB1051; AA STRENGTHENING CONNECTICUTS ELECTIONS

IN SUPPORT OF: HB6950; AAC REFORMS TO ELECTION ADMINISTRATION

SUBMITTED BY: Kathleen Redman, Rep. Registrar & George Cody, Dem. Registrar

GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION AND ELECTION COMMITTEE

MARCH 9, 2015

Chairman Cassano, Chairman Jutila, and members of the Committee, I am submitting testimony on behalf of Kathleen Redman and George Cody, Registrars of Voters in New Canaan. We thank you for the opportunity to address these two critical issues regarding election administration.

You have before you today six bills, all dealing with improving elections and election administration in Connecticut. Recent events justify a thorough review of our states' election process. Many of the proposed bills reflect positive steps, but we would like to address two of the bills before you.

SB1051 AA Strengthening Connecticut's Election's primary element is the replacement of elected Registrars with an undefined system of local 'legislative' appointment of a single "non-partisan" applicant with the consultation and cooperation of local Town Clerks, who would then have sole authority to appoint a Deputy and Assistant Registrar of Voters. This removes a major level of party representation in election management. The proposed changes will affect how every member of this Committee, the Legislature and Municipality are elected. The primary tasks of the Registrar of Voters are to encourage every eligible voter to register, every registered voter to vote and to make sure that every vote is counted in a fair and honest election.

Fundamental to Connecticut's election laws is the concept of what could be called, 'two sets of eyes.' At every step of the election process, two people of opposite parties or candidates monitor all aspects of election preparation, Election Day operation, and post-election reporting. This system has served our state well, including the provision for two elected Registrars of Voters of opposite parties, assuring the non-partisan application of the election process, including selecting polling places and in the hiring of election officials. Connecticut has protected the rights of each political party to administer their own primaries and participate at each step of election administration.

Connecticut has a working system of dual election administration that has served our voters and candidates well. That there have been instances of poorly run elections or of poor cooperation between Registrars, is not disputed, but the prevailing attitude of the legislature in the past has been that problems such as these are best handled at the local level. In those occasions where the system has failed, corrective action has been taken at the local level, often in close coordination with the Secretary of State's election division. Recent events may be cause to modify current procedures and statutes, but do not justify these wholesale transformation.

That our system is unique is not a reason to abandon it. The Legislature should be mindful that partisan application of "election reform" might well foster the distrust that our dual management system has largely avoided. Local control of election appointment could easily raise charges that the party in control of the town would then appoint a 'like-minded' Registrar or Registrars. Even with appointed Registrars the slightest error during an election — which happens because people make mistakes — would invite accusations of partisan manipulation.

The Registrars are the bulwark of assuring fair and honest elections of every elected official in the State of Connecticut and in every Municipality. We are the sole guarantors of fair and equal application of the statutes as to intra-party caucus and primaries. Party and voter confidence should not have to rely on another party running and supervising their primaries. The pre-dominant two year terms assures a local municipality's ability to deal with a problem on a local level through the party primary system and general elections. Local problems should be dealt with locally with enforceable oversight by the SOTS and Election Enforcement. Removal of half the Registrars is not a solution.

There are many elements of this bill that Registrars can embrace and have been proposing for many years. Training, education and a program leading to certification of Registrars, Moderators, and all election officials has been part of our legislative package for over ten years. We support HB6950 AAC Reforms to Election Administration, which incorporates many of the best parts of the Secretary of State's proposal, while addressing other areas we feel would improve the election and post-election process as to cross-endorsed candidates.

We thank the Committee Members for their attention and perseverance in what will be a controversial and lengthy hearing. We would be happy to answer any questions on these or any other bills on today's agenda.

Kathleen Redman and George Cody